King: Lawyer

Memphis (UPI) — Percy Foreman, defense attorney for James Earl Ray, said today the FBI had a squad assigned to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for the two years before his assassination to prevent the murder of the civil rights leader.

Foreman made the disclosure during a brief hearing before Judge W. Preston Battle of Shelby County Criminal Court that was called to set a firm date for the start of Ray's trial on charges of slaying King April 4 in Memphis.

Foreman asked for an unspecified delay, and the prosecution objected. Judge Battle kept the tentative March 3 trial date but said he would postpone it if unforeseen problems arose in preparation of the defense.

During Exchange

Word of the FBI squad assigned to King came during an exchange between Foreman and Robert K. Dwyer, assistant attorney general for Shelby County.

Three times, Foreman said, he has asked FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover for the FBI's files on King and on the $1.4-million murder investigation the FBI has made in the assassination.

"It (the FBI file) says that for two years before April 4 there was a squad of FBI agents assigned to prevent the assassination of Martin Luther King," Foreman said.

"I'm working on the presumption that someone other than James Earl Ray was concerned with this murder," Foreman said.

He made no further reference to the FBI squad and the prosecution did not comment on it.

'Be A Miracle'

Foreman, asking for a second delay in the trial, said, "It will be a miracle if the case is ready by March 3."

Foreman, the celebrated Texas trial lawyer, stepped into the case Nov. 10 two days before Ray's trial was to begin. Ray fired his first defense attorney, Arthur J. Hanes Sr., former mayor of Birmingham, Ala.

"I was the last chance, as I saw it, for this man," Foreman said, turning to Ray who sat quietly at his side in the small courtroom.

Foreman complained that Hanes had done little or no investigative work to try the case and added:

'To Meet Deadline'

"He (Hanes) was about to go to trial not because this case was ready to go to trial but to meet a publication date for a book.

"I'm not willing at this late date in my life to prostitute